

ASPRIG OF HOLLY.

I'm getting old; I'm nearly sixty-five years old now, and not the man I was. Well, since I must tell you a story, I'll tell you how a sprig of holly once saved my life.

It must be—let me see—aye, it was nearly forty years ago, that I was travelling through a rather wild part of Ireland. Though I'm well-to-do now, I was but a pig-jobber then; I earned a fair living, certainly, but I had to work for it. I bought pigs right nearly all the fairs in Ireland, shipped them for Liverpool, and made a small profit on each shipment.

It was somewhere about Christmas time, and unusually severe weather. We had quite different winters forty years ago to what we have now. I was on my way to Cork, to buy a lot of forty or fifty pigs, and the snow lay so thick on the ground that the cross-way was dangerous and I was compelled to stop for a day and a night at a sort of hostelry, half-sheep, half inn. There wasn't a human habitation about it for a circle of four or five miles, except the wretched huts of the peasantry. It had the strange sign of the Garden of Eden, surrounded by morasses filled with dangerous bogs and peat holes. The landlord's name was Patrick O'Fea, and he was a widower, with one daughter, who helped him to retail his whiskey to each of the wild 'boys' around as could furnish the half-pence for it. Norah O'Fea was called a 'downright pretty colleen.' But I never fancied her. She was handsome, certainly, straight and tall as a poplar, with very beautiful black hair. However, there was a cold restless glitter in her eyes that reminded me of a snake. I don't know if you ever saw a viper in a peat moss gliding away with an angry stare at you. Well, that is exactly the look that was in Norah O'Fea's eyes.

I had arrived at the Garden of Eden about six o'clock in the day, but it might have been two hours after when I was sitting at a meal of bacon and eggs in the parlor of the inn. O'Fea was then absent at a wake several miles off, and not expected home till the morrow or day after that. So the whole management of the business fell upon Norah.

The room was really rather a good one, partly like an English tap-room, and partly like a kitchen. It had a sanded floor, and several little wooden tables set in different parts of it, each with a spittoon underneath it, in fact, as you may see in the tap-room of an English public-house.

At one end of the room was a large, old-fashioned fireplace at which Norah was carrying on the culinary business. Besides myself—I sat alone at one of the tables—there were three or four customers at the other end of the room—some drinking and some smoking; others like myself, making an evening meal. They seemed to be of the superior class of tenantry, and one, I fancied, was a drover.

Well, I had finished my supper—which I must say I enjoyed heartily—and I was taking a whiff at my pipe—when the door opened and in came a stout, thick-set young fellow with an enormous shillelagh, who immediately made himself very much at home. He had a bullet-shaped head, and such deep-set eyes, and there was an extremely disagreeable, overbearing way with him, which reminded one of a swaggering prize-fighter, for all prize-fighters swagger, you know.

Norah O'Fea took no notice of the new comer, who took his seat at one of the tables, and helped himself to whiskey, as if the whole place belonged to him.

Presently, when the young woman had finished her cooking, she advanced towards her visitor—he was at the next table to mine, and I could hear all they said—and wished him good evening; and, indeed, it was evident from the manner of both that they were engaged lovers.

"Anything in our line?" he asked her at length.

"Whist, Dennis dear," she said, casting a side glance around. "Sure, father told me before he went to give you this letter."

She produced a large square letter, written in a scrawling hand, on a coarse paper, and fastened with a common red wafer.

The young man perused it hastily, and a gleam of satisfaction lit up his bulldog-like face. I felt that he took a stealthy glance at me, but I feigned to be busily engaged in filling my pipe.

At last, after a few lover-like passages between the pair—such as "the young man departed, and I, wearied out by the fatigues of the day, desired to be shown up to where I was to sleep. Much to my surprise, Norah demanded payment for my supper.

"I will pay you all together in the morning," said I, astonished at the request.

But she insisted, and declared that it was the rule of the inn that a customer should pay at once for all he had.

I felt embarrassed, as I remembered that, except a few coppers, I had no small change. I had fifty pounds in my pocket-book to pay for my pigs, but did not care about exhibiting the bank-notes in what I felt a right now to consider questionable company. However, the young woman persisted in so vexatious and determined a manner that there was no help for it. I pulled out my pocket-book.

"You may see," said I, "that I have only bank-notes, so your reckoning is safe."

She coolly took out one of the notes, examined it, and finding it perfectly genuine, returned it to me.

"Very well," said she. "Now I am satisfied. Come this way."

And she led me to the apartment

where I was to sleep, and giving me a light, left me.

It was a loft rather than a room, but of small dimensions. Still, it was not uncomfortable; and what pleased as well as surprised me was to find a good fire burning. I scarcely expected that so much regard would be paid to the comfort of a chance customer. What did not appear comfortable to me was that in the door of the room—if room it could be called—there was a large cleft, as if it had a piece cut out by a hatchet, and through which I fancied the cold air must penetrate.

Lying in my small bed, which faced this door, I could see through the aperture into the stairs outside, where stood a large, old-fashioned clock, which kept up a perpetual, but unpleasant ticking. It seemed at most, like company in that lonely place; but as I lay in bed I could distinctly watch the hands of the clock slowly continuing their round, for the glow of the peat fire shot a light upon its face. I had lain thus about an hour, and had replenished my fire from a basket of peat, which stood beside the hearth, and crept back into bed. I had not the least inclination to sleep. I experienced that wakefulness which all of you have probably experienced when in a strange place.

While thus I lay musing, and watching the hands of the clock—it was just eleven—I heard a stealthy step on the stairs, and almost immediately a face presented itself at the aperture in my door. I had the presence of mind to feign sleep, but I could see what was going on with my slightly-opened eyelids.

The face was that of Norah O'Fea. After she had looked in, she applied her ear to the gap in the door and listened intently. Satisfied apparently by my regular breathing, that I was fast asleep, she advanced to the clock, and stuck before its face a branch of yew. Then she departed.

I felt as I must be dreaming. What could bring a young woman out of her bed in the middle of the night to ornament the clock? My room, the room below, and the passage beneath itself, were already garlanded for Christmas with an abundance of evergreens—holly, mistletoe, bay, ivy and yew. Could she be walking in her sleep? The thing appeared strange to me; and if I had felt little inclination for sleep previously, I now felt less than ever.

So I lay on, watching the clock and wondering what all this might mean, when suddenly an irresistible impulse came upon me.

You must all know what it is to be seized occasionally by some impulse to do a thing apparently trivial in itself—as, for example, to touch a particular post in passing down a street, or to turn over a certain number of leaves in a book, or it may be to turn down a particular street not in your direct way. If you have not experienced this, you are different from myself, and no words of mine can make you understand my feelings.

Well, the impulse that came over me was to take out the spray of yew which Norah O'Fea had fastened over the clock, and to replace it by a spray of holly.

I glanced, by the light of my peat fire, around my room, and saw the thing for my purpose.

Over an old-fashioned, worsted-work sampler—framed and glazed as some great work of art—hung a most glorious spray of holly. It was covered with berries.

Taking this sprig I withdrew the branch of yew from the clock, and put the holly in its place.

To this day I cannot tell why, but as I crept back to my bed, I experienced a strange thrill of satisfaction, as if I had done some very wise and clever thing.

Another hour might have passed away, and I was still lying awake, ruminating on this strange occurrence, when a second time I heard a footstep on the stairs. Through my eyelids I took care to see who this fresh intruder might be. To my horror it was the bullet-headed young giant who had received the letter from Norah O'Fea.

My suspense did not last long. He glanced in at me from the cleft in the door with a scowl that made my blood run cold. Then he glanced up at the clock, and with a savage oath of disappointment departed down the staircase as stealthily as he had ascended.

What could it mean?

You may be sure I did not close my eyes in sleep that night. I resolved, no matter how severe the weather, to leave those strange quarters in the morning.

With the earliest dawn I was astir, and naturally looked at the clock with some curiosity.

I had no sooner opened the door than my eyes fell upon a letter, lying on the door at my feet. It was the letter which I had seen Norah O'Fea hand to her sweetheart on the previous evening. I will leave you to judge what my feelings were when I perused its contents, which were as follows:—I do not give it in the exact language of the illiterate writer:

"Dennis, if any of them cattle-dealing oddgers come here on their way to Cork, and wants speaking, Norah I find out, as I'm going to Tim Malrooney's wake. If there's anything to be done, she will put a branch of yew in front of the old clock, if not, a branch of holly."

This then was the mystery: the yew signified that I was to be robbed—probably murdered, as my body could be easily hidden away in any of the bog holes that surrounded this Garden. All who would make inquiries after an insignificant pig-jobber could be easily quieted. Thus my instinctive impulse to replace the yew by the holly—not by the way of the ivy or the mistletoe, remember, although there were plenty of these all around—in all probability saved my life. You may be certain I lost no

time in forwarding my own expulsion from this Garden of Eden. I did not scruple to steal away without paying my reckoning. Would you have scrupled, gentlemen? I could see now why Norah wanted to ascertain what my pocket-book contained. I never stopped—knee-deep in snow—till I reached the nearest town, whence I proceeded to Cork. I bought my pigs cheap, and I sold them well; from that time I thrive, and am now a man of substance. But that I am alive at all, I shall always believe is entirely owing to that sprig of holly, which I carried off with me.

The Clock Behind.

We are all familiar with the little horoscope which heads the awful columns through which the Jupiter of the British press daily thunders to the shaking of the spheres. Proverbially, it is never too fast; but neither is it, often, or long, very far behind. The march of progress goes on continuously and irresistibly, but it cannot be said with justice that the *Times* follows after it in vain. It does toil after it to purpose; and it will even, momentarily, whisk round in front, when it safely can, and first predict, and then inaugurate, and then herald the "great fact" which it can shrewdly discern to be struggling to the birth.

One "great fact" in the kingdom of physiology has already pretty well made itself good: but Jupiter's time-piece still keeps in relation to inveterate old notions, and the *Times*, and fluids of all kinds, and the *Times*, and colors are wholly unnecessary to man, and to the precise extent in which they are charged with alcohol are venomously bad. Jove, being able, from his social elevation to keep a well-stored cellar, and to present to the minor gods at his table a choice variety of the various nectars, is exceedingly apt to remain obtuse to this till the advancing light streams in upon him with an intensity to be no longer evaded. Not but what many and valuable things ever and anon fall from him on the subject of temperance, for all of which, though often unavoidable, we are sincerely grateful. But on out-and-out temperance truth, in general, and on the above fact in particular, his dialplate remains obstinately at its fixed hour of half-past one—which we suppose may be about the time when his Olympian Majesty takes lunch.

In commenting on the new Church of England movement, from which it augurs all that is desirable in the shape of modern Christianity, the *Times* sees some breakers ahead in probably the very last direction in which any plain man, abstainer or not, would have ever thought of looking for them. It says: "We cannot but look with some anxiety on the growing practice of enrolling young children in 'Bands of Hope,' and laying on them, while unable to judge for themselves, a pledge of total abstinence from an article of food which, in moderation, may become essential to life, and which, if abused, is no less a poison than alcohol." First, in no sense is alcohol food; and this fact the leading journal ought to have recognized and shelved long ere now. The tissues of the human body it can no more build up than a sculptor can build up or hew out a marble figure from the miry clay. Even, as a heat former, it has not only failed to make good its claim but has been convicted of being the direct reverse. As for the little inch of contested ground that remains on the elimination question, let Dr. Anstie and his co-freemen have all that they can rightfully claim, and still that little must be conceded to them under some other heading than that of food. Again, the children are said to be on this subject "unable to judge for themselves." We think, on the contrary, that they are of all judges the very best. Their tastes are yet unvitiated. They are as yet genuine and unsophisticated interpreters of nature, and what nature says through the medium of the senses is to be food, or in any sense to be a benefactor to the human organism, may be read by him that runs in the wry faces and "twisted gruncles" which are sure to appear on any attempt to introduce those fiery liquids within their lips.

But the last expression in the above extract is the most stunning of all, namely, that to every human being that is ushered into this world, alcohol, "in moderation," may presumably become essential to life. The repeated testimony of medical men, individually and collectively, and to the number of thousands, is to have any weight, it has long been settled and established truth that—without extending our verdict to the positive view of the question as to the effects of alcohol, even in moderation—in the negative view it is wholly unnecessary to the maintenance of life and health, while any exceptional use that may be claimed for it must be in the name of medicine, and is amply provided for even in the Band of Hope pledge.

We turn with pleasure from these luxurious fallacies of the *Times* to the fact illustrated at the recent important gathering in London of that Very Band of Hope to which the *Times* refers. The chairman, Mr. Carrington, who recently gave up his large brewing business under conscientious temperance principle, and had himself, ere he did so, been an abstainer four years, mentioned that an old man, over eighty years of age, gave at one of the meetings of August, the following piece of sound testimony and advice: "Young man, if you wish to get to my age, if you want to be strong, if you want to have a head which never aches, and a hand which never shakes, and a voice which never falters, do not touch the intoxicating cup."

Universal military service will shortly become the law of Russia. It is proposed that the period of service will be fifteen years, six of which will be passed in active service, and nine in the reserve.

AGRICULTURAL.

THE SOILING SYSTEM.

(From the Canada Farmer.)

How comes it, inquires a western contemporary, that though the advantages of the soiling system has been thoroughly discussed for many years, and shown by theory and practice to be great and undoubted—their practical adoption in the management of our farms has not become universal?

We doubt if there is one intelligent, enterprising farmer who has tried the soiling system, either partially or in whole, who has not many times put to himself the question suggested by our contemporary. The admitted difficulties in the way of its adoption are no doubt considerable; but they are not so serious as to account for the apathy shown in regard to so great a reform. Thousands of the agriculturists of Canada could adopt the system as the basis of their farm operations without much inconvenience; all of them could adopt it in part without any inconvenience whatever; and the gains from it are so direct, so palpable, so immense, as to sweep away all objections and leave only wonder that soiling is not the universal rule.

Nobody denies that when the heat of summer arrives, as a general rule in Canada pastures become bare, cattle are sorely pinched, milk decreases, young stock become stunted in growth; and that green crops, specially sown to be cut and fed through these weeks of parching drought, do avert all this loss. And yet, early in the season, this small medium of the soiling system.

No intelligent farmer doubts for one moment that the more cattle well kept on a farm, the more manure will be made; that the more manure made, the larger and better will be the grain crops; that, in fact, the profits of farming in Canada hinge on this pivot—and that by even a partial adoption of the soiling system, the number of cattle kept on every farm in the land might be greatly increased and the manure vastly augmented. But, yet, how very few farmers even partially adopt it.

Nobody denies that a vastly larger amount of good cattle fodder can be got from an average acre of green crop, to be cut and carried to the animals, than can be raised on an average acre of ordinary pasture; and that, even of this inferior bulk of pasture grass, the cattle by tramping down and by droppings, destroy at least two-thirds, while the whole of the green crop is saved and eaten. But yet how few farmers have practically tested the relative cost of the two systems, with the fixed determination to adopt the one found most profitable.

No farmer who has considered the subject doubts that even on well-managed dairy farms under the pasture system in Canada and the United States, it requires the produce of from three and a half to five acres of land for the support of a full grown cow or steer for one year. And yet it is easily demonstrable by every farmer in Canada who likes to try the experiment through the coming six months, that three full grown cows or steers can be better fed and maintained in better health and condition on the same space of land by raising green crops and feeding in stables or yards.

We know it is objected that soiling involves a great deal of manual labour and doubtless the labour is greater than in pasturing; but the cash returns far more than compensate it. That buildings are required specially adapted to it—but this, though expedient where a large herd is kept, is not imperative:—That the animals are cramped and injured by confinement—but this is not so; and if it were, they need not be housed in summer, but fed with cut food in a yard or "bush." That it is an unnatural system and destructive of health to keep beasts in stables—but the very contrary is the fact.

We entertain not a shadow of a doubt that whether applied to the management of dairy stock, or cattle intended for the butcher, or thoroughbred stock breeding purposes, the soiling system is incomparably the best and most profitable. We are satisfied—

That it saves land—

That it economizes fencing—

That it keeps cattle in greater comfort and higher condition—

That it produces more milk—and

That it enhances immensely the quantity and quality of the manure.

In a system of soiling adapted to Canada, 1500 sown at intervals during September and October, and pushed on so as to be ready for cutting in May, will naturally be the first crop. Green Rye is a first-rate fodder crop; and properly treated gives fifteen tons to the acre. One acre of it will maintain well twelve cows for an entire month—or in the proportion of one cow for an entire year. The same land on which Rye is thus grown, can be easily got ready for a second crop—say of Western Corn, drilled in. The weight of green corn stalks to be obtained in this manner from an acre, depends on the character and condition of the soil, the character of the season and the promptitude with which the seed is got in after removing the Rye. It is best to hurry in the corn seed, from day to day, as fast as the Rye is out. Under favourable circumstances, 20 tons of green Corn stalks to the acre may be expected; 15 tons to the acre is a poor crop. Last year (1872) 21 acres of Western Corn, sown as above after Rye, so late as the beginning of August, yielded an average of 18 tons to the acre of splendid forage. Now let any one compare the profit from an acre of land yielding 15 tons of rye and 18 tons of corn stalks in one season, with the profit from the same acre devoted to pasture, and he will see that the cost of planting, reaping and feeding the two green crops is as nothing in comparison with the direct cash gains from that system.

The crop that usually follows rye in

Canadian soiling is common red clover. With a good dose of gypsum at the first blanch of spring, clover is ready for cutting in June; but it is wise to cut as little of it as possible, and to save it for hay. A good crop of ripe green clover, on suitable land in good condition, weighs from 10 to 14 tons per acre, according to the season, from the first cutting; a second cutting, equally good, can usually be got; and even a third crop may sometimes be taken if deemed expedient.

Clover after clover should come oats, sown thickly very early in spring, or oats and tares, or better still, oats, peas and tares sown together. The green forage obtained from either of these crops is succulent and delicious, and the weight in favourable seasons, enormous. Even in 1871 and 1872 good crops were obtained by early sowing and thereby getting the land screened from the hot rays of the sun. We have never known the produce of an acre of this crop to be weighed, and therefore speak with reserve as to it; but we should deem twelve tons per acre a poor crop, and from twenty to twenty-five tons a good one.

But the grand soiling crop for Western Canada is Ohio corn drilled in. No crop is so ravenous of manure as Indian corn; but give it plenty of that, and keep the weeds down, and no other crop will yield the cash returns that it will. Let the season be what it may, the corn stalks will be a profitable crop; and in a good season, properly cured, and properly saved and cut for winter use, there is nothing to compare with it as an abundant and profitable forage crop. Early planted and rightly cultivated, twenty-five tons per acre of green Ohio corn stalks is a poor crop, and thirty-five tons is a good one.

The fact is, there are not two sides to this question. The soiling system has but to be fairly tested, to make the candid experimenter an enthusiastic advocate of its surpassing merits. Our space is exhausted for this number, but we shall have much to say hereafter on this subject.

When Jenny Lind was in this country, she once attended the Bethel Church in Boston, where the well remembered Father Taylor was pastor. The good man, who did not know that she was present, was requested, as he entered the house, to preach on amusements. The church was crowded, and the pulpit stairs were filled. The sermon opposed dancing, card-playing, and theatre-going, but approved music. The preacher paid a glowing tribute to the power of song, and to the goodness, modesty and charity of the sweetest singers "now lighted on those shores." Jenny Lind was leaning forward, and clapped her hands with delight, when a tall person rose on the pulpit stairs and inquired whether any one who died at one of Miss Lind's concerts would go to heaven. Disgust and contempt swept across Father Taylor's face, as he glanced at the interloper. "A Christian will go to heaven wherever he dies; and a fool will be a fool wherever he is—even if he is on the steps of the pulpit."

A man named Francis Jordan of Malden, while sailing up the Detroit River on Sunday last, discovered the body of a woman about a mile from the head of Fighting Island, in the Canadian channel. He was running in close to the island with his craft to escape a field of ice, when he came upon the body, or rather the skeleton. It had first caught in the weeds, and then some driftwood had struck the bank a few feet below, forming a dam to hold back a quantity of ice and debris. The body was wedged fast in the ice and driftwood, and had been in the water so long that all of the clothing, except here and there a shred, and most of the flesh, had disappeared. One of the feet was above water, and as near as Jordan could make out, the shoe was a faded prunella boot, buttoned at the side. On the third finger of the left hand was a plain coral ring, but there was no other jewelry that could be seen, and Jordan doubts if the unfortunate can be identified by the clothing. The body is probably that of some unfortunate who met her death at some point above last fall, and has been grinding in the ice for months.

For burning Judge Keoh in eighty thirty persons were, the week before last, sentenced to various terms of imprisonment at the Fermanagh Assizes.

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